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PHILIP FRENEAU

SOME ACCOUNT
of
THE CAPTURE
of the
SHIP — AVRORA



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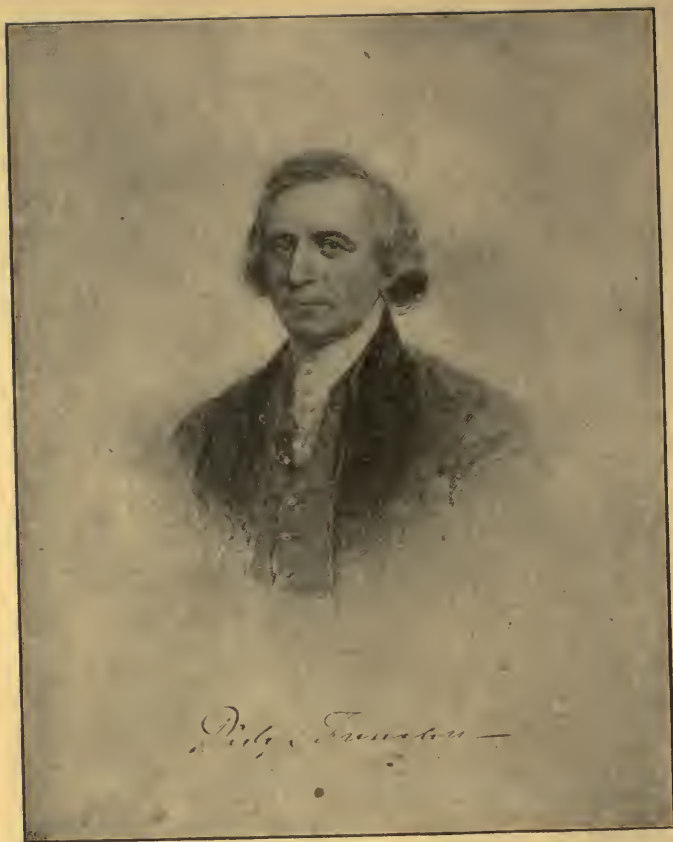
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P H I L I P F R E N E A U





SOME ACCOUNT
of the
CAPTURE OF THE
SHIP “AURORA”

BY
PHILIP FRENEAU



M. F. MANSFIELD & A. WESSELS
NEW YORK

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1899

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Agnes Watson
Mother of Philip Freneau

I N T R O D U C T I O N

The following account of the capture of the ship *Aurora* was written by Philip Freneau, the "Poet of the Revolution," at his Mount Pleasant home, July 14, 1780, two days after his release from the British Hospital Ship *Hunter*.

The poet was then in his twenty-eighth year, and for so young a man his career had been exciting and varied. He was born in Frankfort Street, in the city of New York, January 2, 1752. The family was of French Huguenot descent, and with the Pintards, Jays, Delanceys, and many other prominent Huguenots who sought refuge in this country from the religious and civil persecutions consequent upon the Revocation by Louis XIV. of the Edict of Nantes, founded the old St. Esprit Church on Pine Street, New York City, which was long the centre of Huguenot influence on this continent.

His father, Pierre Freneau, married Agnes Watson, of the Province of New Jersey, one of the most cultivated and beautiful women of the time. He died soon after the poet's birth, and his widow and children removed to the large estate at Mount Pleasant, which he had purchased a short time before his death. Of the boyhood of Philip Freneau there is little known. At the age of sixteen years he entered the College of New Jersey, so far advanced in Latin that the acting president wrote a congratulatory letter on his proficiency to his mother.



I N T R O D U C T I O N

In 1768, in his sophomore year, he composed and had printed "The Political History of the Prophet Jonah," which obtained for him an immediate recognition of his genius by both classmates and faculty. After a brilliant career at college, he was graduated in the year 1771.

Evert A. Duyckinck in his memoir on Philip Freneau says: "It was a creditable year for the institution when he graduated, for in his class were James Madison, the future President; Hugh Henry Brekenridge, the celebrated judge, and author of 'Modern Chivalry,' besides others of note in the annals of America, among whom we may mention the father of the Rev. Dr. Gardiner Spring, Samuel Spring, who became a chaplain of the Revolutionary army, was with Arnold at the attack of Quebec in 1775, and in the disastrous affair carried in his arms the wounded Aaron Burr from the field." The commencement exercises at Nassau Hall that year, 1771, were of unusual interest. It was in the presidency of that eminent patriot, John Witherspoon, who, though born in Scotland, was proving himself by his enlightened sagacity and devotion to freedom an "American of Americans." The political independence of America, though not formally proclaimed, was ripening in Massachusetts and elsewhere to its great declaration and invincible resolve. The young patriots of Princeton, on a spot destined to become memorable in the struggle, were already animated by the kindling promise of the future.



I N T R O D U C T I O N

Breckenridge and Freneau had already developed a taste for poetry, and they united for their commencement exercise in the composition of a dialogue, "A Poem on the Rising Glory of America," which they pronounced together, founding in animated blank verse the achievements of colonization in the past, and the visionary grandeur of the empire hereafter. This poem was published in Philadelphia in 1772, where Freneau went to reside with the intention of studying law, but owing to the unsettled state of the country, his mind was directed into other channels.

In 1774 he went to New York City, where he resided two years, writing and publishing satirical pieces and political burlesques, ridiculing the King, Royalists, and neutrals, and gaining great popularity for himself, and many converts to Whig principles.

During the year 1776 he embarked for the West Indies on a mercantile venture. He remained there several months where he wrote two of his best poems, "The House of Night," and "The Beauties of Santa Cruz." He returned in 1777, and after a short stay in America sailed for Bermuda. The exact length of time he spent in Bermuda is not known, but in 1779 he was in Philadelphia editing, for Francis Baily, *The United States Magazine*. This periodical was not successful, and on its discontinuance he again turned his attention to the sea. Having obtained letters of marque, he built and fitted out the

REIGN OF KING CHARLES THE FIRST

IN WHICH ARE CONTAINED THE
MOST IMPORTANT AND INTERESTING
PARTS OF HIS REIGN, FROM
THE BEGINNING OF HIS
MAYESTY'S REIGN, TO THE
END OF HIS REIGN, IN THE
YEAR OF HIS MAJESTY'S DEATH.

BY JOHN BURNET, ESQ.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

LONDON, Printed by J. BARNARD, at the

PRINTING OFFICE, in ST. MARTIN'S LANE, 1724.

THE SECOND VOLUME.

IN WHICH ARE CONTAINED THE

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

ship *Aurora*, at Philadelphia, which soon after leaving the waters of the Delaware, was fired upon and captured by a British frigate. In "Some Account of the Capture of the Ship *Aurora*," which has never before been published, he has given a vivid account of the capture and the hardships and indignities he was subjected to while a prisoner in the hands of the British.

A hundred and nineteen years have elapsed since it was written that July day, 1780, by the poet in the old Mount Pleasant home. With other precious manuscripts, including a letter from James Madison, the President, praising Freneau's genius; several from the poet's brother, Peter Freneau, known to fame as the American Addison, and many others from celebrated people of that day, it was bequeathed by the poet to his granddaughter, Jane Leadbeater. Believing it would interest students and lovers of American history, and awaken interest in the greatest American poet and writer of the 18th century, her heirs have consented to its publication.

In this short introduction, which is but a brief outline of the principal events in his career until the year 1780, I am indebted for information to members of the Freneau family, and have also borrowed from Freneau's *Memoirs*, by Evert Duyckink and Rufus Wilmot Griswold.

JAY MILLES.

Fac-Simile
of
MS.
of
Philip Freneau

the Account of the Capture of the Ship *Guirina*. -
On the 25. of May in beating down Delaware Bay we unfortunately captured
a small Schooner from the Portuguese loaded with Corn which hindered us from
standing out to Sea that night whereby in all probability we should
have avoided the Enemy which afterwards captured us -
For Day Morning May, 26. The Air very smoky and the Wind somewhat
faintish, though it afterwards freshened up. The Wind was so that
we stood off N.E. after putting the Pilot on board the small Schooner, ~~for~~
Henderson in the *Guirina*, and under way the Prize for Cape May. About
three o'clock in the afternoon we discovered three Sail bearing from us about
S.N.E. they were not more than ten leagues from us when we discovered
them from the fore top, at the same time we could see them from the
Quarter Deck. we appeared to be a pretty large Ship, the other two
Bribs. we soon found they were in chase of us: we therefore backed im-
mediately, set all sail we could crowd and stood back for the Bay. May d.
vice to the officers were to stand for Egg Harbor or any part of the Jersey
Shore and run the Ship on the flat Bottom then he lay on. but this was
disregarded. we being continued to stand in the we saw Cape Elizabeth
the frigate in the mean time gaining on us apace, about six hours

Some Account of the Capture of the Ship Aurora



ON the 25th of May, in beating down Delaware Bay, we unfortunately retook a small sloop from the refugees loaded with corn, which hindered us from standing out to sea that night, whereby in all probability we should have avoided the enemy which afterward captured us.

Friday morning, May 26. The air very smoky and the wind somewhat faintish, though it afterward freshened up. The wind was so that we stood off E. S. E. after putting the pilot on board the small sloop, handcuffing the prisoners, and sending the prize to Cape May. About three o'clock in the afternoon we discovered three sail bearing from us about E. N. E.; they were not more than five leagues from us when we discovered them from the foretop, at the same time we could see them from the quarter-deck. One appeared to be a pretty

1870

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large ship, the other two, brigs. We soon found they were in chase of us; we therefore tacked immediately, set all sail we could crowd, and stood back for the bay. My advice to the officers was to stand for Egg Harbor or any part of the Jersey shore and run the ship on the flats rather than be taken; but this was disregarded. We continued to stand in till we saw Cape Henlopen; the frigate, in the mean time, gaining on us apace; sun about half an hour high. We were abreast of the cape, close in, when the wind took us aback, and immediately after we were becalmed; the ebb of tide at the same time setting very strong out of the bay so that we rather drifted out. Our design was, if possible, to get within the road around the point, and there run the ship on shore, but want of wind and the tide being against us, hindered from putting this into execution. We were now within three hundred yards of the shore. The frigate in the mean time ran in the bay to leeward of us about one-quarter of a mile (her distance from the cape hindering it from becalming her as it did us), and began to bring her cannon to bear on us. Her two prizes hove to; one we knew to be the



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brig *Active*, Captain Mesnard ; the other, as we afterward learned, was a Salem brig from the West Indies. The frigate was the *Iris* returning from Charleston to New York with the express of the former's being taken. We now began to fire upon each other at the distance of about three hundred yards. The frigate hulled us several times. One shot went betwixt wind and water, which made the ship leak amazingly, making twenty-four inches in thirty minutes. We found our four-pounders but were trifles against the frigate, so we got our nine-pounder, the only one we had, pointed from the cabin windows, with which we played upon the frigate for about half an hour. At last a twelve-pound shot came from the frigate and, striking a parcel of oars lashed upon the starboard quarter, broke them all in two, and continuing its destructive course struck Captain Laboyteaux in the right thigh, which it smashed to atoms, tearing part of his belly open at the same time with the splinters from the oars ; he fell from the quarter deck close by me and for some time seemed very busily engaged in setting his leg to rights. He died about eleven the same night and

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next day was sewed up in his hammock and sunk. Every shot seemed now to bring ruin with it. A lad named Steel had his arm broken and some others complained of slight wounds; whereupon, finding the frigate ready and in a position to give us a broad-side, we struck, after having held a very unequal contest with her for about an hour.

During the engagement six or seven of our people hoisted out the yawl and made their escape to the shore, though at the most imminent hazard of their lives, as we afterward learned that they pointed a twelve-pounder at her from the frigate and were unanimously for sinking her except Captain Hawkes, whose humanity would not suffer the piece to be fired, which was loaded with round grape shot. As soon as we struck, one Squires with some midshipmen came on board and took possession of the vessel.

Squires was prize master. They had six sailors with them. I informed the prize master I was a passenger on board and supposed I might be excused from going on board the frigate on that account. He then asked me several questions, where I was going, etc. I satisfied him in everything, and in return

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was assured I might stay on board our own vessel till we got to New York, where he said he did not doubt I would get my liberty immediately. This assurance hindered me from packing up anything in my chest to carry with me on board the frigate, but when the barge came the last time for prisoners, I was cruelly seized and driven down the sides, in the sight of Squires, into the barge, among the common sailors, and could not even get liberty to go to my chest to put on anything, so that I had to go on board the frigate in my common ship clothes.

All the satisfaction I could get from Squires was that I should have my chest safe and sound next morning; he also swore that he had no one on board who would meddle with it. With this promise I was obliged to be contented and went on board the frigate, it being now dark. I was ranged along with the common sailors on the quarter-deck, though I strongly remonstrated against it to the master-at-arms, who seemed to have the management of us.

I represented to him that I was a passenger, going on my private business to the islands, and insisted

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that such usage was cruel, inhuman, and unjust. He asked me if I was not a colonist; I told him I was an American; then said he, you have no right to expect favors more than others.

The list of us was now taken, and we were ordered down to be handcuffed, two and two. I expected nothing else to have been my fate; when we got between decks I thought I should have been suffocated with the heat. There were about one hundred prisoners forward, the stench of whom was almost intolerable—so many melancholy sights, and dismal countenances made it a pretty just representation of the infernal region. I marched through a torrent of cursing and blasphemy to my station, viz., at the blacksmith's vice, where the miserable prisoners were handcuffed two and two. At last it came my turn. "Pray," said I, "is it your custom to handcuff passengers? The Americans, I am confident, never used the English so."

"Are you a passenger?" said the blacksmith, at the same time, happening to look up, I saw Hugh Ray looking steadily at me, who immediately seized my hand, and asked me how I did.

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“Do you know him?” said Holmes, the master-at-arms. “Then you are free from irons; come over among the gentlemen.”

This was an unexpected deliverance from a cursed disgrace which I hardly knew how I should get clear of. After this, I was used very well by everybody. The next day I expected my chest on board hourly, but had the mortification to hear nothing of it, and was suffered to come on deck but twice about five minutes at a time the whole day. The day after, Squires came on board us, and I took that opportunity to renew my application for my chest, saying that I could not dress myself so as to appear decent for the want of it. He replied that I must wait until we got to New York, as it would be very inconvenient to hoist the boats out while we were at sea. Saturday afternoon we entered the Hook, and Monday, about twelve o'clock, anchored in the North River. Wednesday all the prisoners were sent from the *Iris* to the Prison-ship, except the Captains, Surgeons, and Passengers.

Thursday, Hulings, the Deputy Commissary, came on board and took us on shore to the Commissary's

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office. I should have observed that before this, Captain Sutton told me that Captain Hawkes had promised him I should have my liberty to go where I pleased, so that I had no expectation of going on board the prison-ship. I was much surprised, therefore, at the commissary's office, when I was denied even a parole, especially as Captain Hawkes and all his officers had promised me repeatedly that at least I should be paroled to Long Island; but Captain Sutton afterward informed me that his second mate had taken upon him to enroll me among those who were stationed at the guns, and he believed this would be some detriment to me. I answered him that as he had been exact enough with regard to my paying my passage, he should have seen that I was not put in any of their enrollments, and added, with a good deal of resentment, that I wished that I had never seen the ships, and immediately walked away. To return: At the commissary's office, as I saw before, Captain Maynard and myself were refused our paroles. Hulings told me that the Americans so generally disregarded their paroles that they must take care who they trusted for the future. I told him if he would

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suffer me to go with the guard to a friend of mine in town I would get them security even to £10,000, that I would stay within the limits of my parole till I was exchanged. He refused letting me go anywhere, only he said if I would write a letter he would take it from me the next day and deliver it to Mr. Gardner. I had writ Mr. Gardner from the *Iris*, by a person who I am sure delivered the letter ; but I received no answer. After this, viz., on Thursday, June 1, Captain Maynard and myself were conducted on board the *Scorpion* prison-ship, lying off the college in the North River. At sundown we were ordered down between the decks to the number of nearly three hundred of us. The best lodging I could procure this night was on a chest, almost suffocated with the heat and stench. I expected to die before morning, but human nature can bear more than one would at first suppose. The want of bedding and the loss of all my clothes rendered me wretched indeed ; besides the uncertainty of being exchanged, for who could assure me that I should not lie six or eight months in this horrid prison? One, Gauzoo, was steward of the ship—one of the most

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brutal of mankind, who abused us continually. It is impossible for words to give his character; it seemed as though he could not give any of us a civil word upon the most indifferent occasion. When he was not cursing us, he kept in his cabin in gloomy reserve, the most vile and detestable of mortals.

June 3d. About midnight the weather was very stormy and the river uncommonly rough. The ship rolled considerably, and the water gushed into some of the lower ports, which made some of the landsmen who slept in the cable tier imagine she was sinking. In a moment the alarm became general. "The ship is sinking! the ship is sinking!" was echoed fore and aft. I expected every moment to feel myself afloat in the berth where I lay; but at the same time considering it would be a folly to drown between decks when I might perhaps get on shore somehow, I jumped up and hurried toward the main hatchway, where a multitude was endeavoring to get out; the sentries at the same time beating on their heads with their drawn swords and marquets without mercy, imagining the whole to be a scheme of our insurrection. Some lamented that they should never

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see their wives and children again; others begged by the love of God to be let upon deck and they would bind themselves slaves forever on board a man-of-war, or any other service. There was an Italian gunner who prayed to St. Anthony most heartily, and desired the prayers of his holy father, the Pope, in case he should be drowned. To such ridiculous distress does the fear of death reduce the generality of mankind when they apprehend it to be nigh. After some trouble we got a light, and examining the pump-well, found the ship dry and tight. The mistake of the water coming in the port was soon detected, and the same shut and caulked. Indeed, it was a dismal night. But upon the next night we were doomed to experience more real danger. About thirty-five of our people formed a design of making their escape, in which they were favored by a large schooner accidentally alongside of us. She was one that was destined for the expedition to Elizabeth Town, and anchored just astern of us. We were then suffered to continue upon deck, if we chose, till nine o'clock. We were all below by that time except the insurgents, who rushed upon the sentries and dis-

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armed them in a moment ; one they tied by his neck stock to the quarter rails, and carried off his marquet with them (they were all Hessians), the rest they drove down with their arms into the cabin, and rammed the sentry-box down the companion in such a manner that no one could get up or down. One, Murphy, possessed himself of Gauzoo's silver-hilted sword, and carried it off with him. When the sentries were all silent they manned the ship's boat and boarded the schooner, though the people on board attempted to keep them off with hand-spikes. The wind blowing fresh at south and the flood of tide being made, they hoisted sail and were out of sight in a few minutes. These particulars we learned from some who were on duty, but were unsuccessful in getting into the boat. As soon as the sentries got possession of the vessel again, which they had no difficulty in doing, as there was no resistance made, they posted themselves at each hatchway, and most basely and cowardly fired fore and aft among us, pistols and marquets for a full quarter of an hour without intermission. By the mercy of God, they touched but four, one mortally ; another had his

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great toe shot off, the other two slightly. I believe they meant by this piece of cruelty to atone to their masters for their being disarmed in the manner they were. The next morning the Deputy Commissary came on board to muster the company to see who was missing. All that were found wounded were put in irons and ordered to lie upon deck, exposed to the burning sun. About four o'clock P.M., one of the poor fellows who had been wounded the night before died. They then took him out of irons, sent him on shore, and buried him. After this no usage seemed to them severe enough for us. We had water given us to drink that a dog could scarcely relish; it was thick and clammy and had a dismal smell. They withdrew our allowance of rum, and drove us down every night strictly at sunset, where we suffered inexpressibly till seven o'clock in the morning, the gratings being rarely opened before that time. Thus did I live with my miserable companions till the 22d of June. When finding myself taken with a fever, I procured myself to be put on the sick list, and the same day was sent with a number of others to the *Hunter* hospital-ship, lying in the East River.

THE HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF BOSTON
FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT
TO THE PRESENT TIME
IN TWO VOLUMES
BY NATHANIEL BENTLEY
OF THE BARR, AT LAW
IN THE CITY OF BOSTON
PUBLISHED BY J. B. BENTLEY
AT THE PRESS OF J. B. BENTLEY
No. 1. CORNHILL
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Some Account of the Capture of the Ship Aurora

Here was a new scene opened. The *Hunter* had been very newly put to the use of a hospital-ship. She was miserably dirty and cluttered. Her decks leaked to such a degree that the sick were deluged with every shower of rain. Between decks they lay along struggling in the agonies of death; dying with putrid and bilious fevers; lamenting their hard fate to die at such a fatal distance from their friends; others totally insensible, and yielding their last breath in all the horrors of light-headed frenzy.

I cannot forbear quoting a few lines from Milton (Lib XI., 480):—

“Immediately a place
Before his eyes appear'd, sad, noisome, dark;
A lazar-house it seem'd; wherein were laid
Numbers of all diseased; all maladies
Of ghastly spasm, or racking torture, qualms
Of heart-sick agony, all feverous kinds,
Convulsions, epilepsies, fierce catarrhs,
Intestine stone and ulcer, cholic pangs,
Demonic frenzy, moping melancholy,
And moon-struck madness, pining atrophy,
Marasmus, and wide-wasting pestilence,
Dropsies, and asthmas, and joint-racking rheums.
Dire was the tossing, deep the groans; Despair
Tended the sick,” etc.

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Our allowance in the *Hunter*, to those upon full diet, was one pound of bread and one pound of fresh beef per diem; to those upon half diet, one pound of bread and one-half pound of beef or mutton per diem. Every other day we had a cask of spruce beer sent on board. Our fresh beef was generally heads or shanks, and would just answer to make soup. A German doctor attended every morning at eight o'clock and administered such remedies as were thought proper. Thus things went on, two or three dying every day, who were carried on shore and buried in the bank, till three of our crew, who had got pretty hearty, stole the boat one night and made their escape. This occasioned new trouble. The doctor refused to come on board, and as he rowed past us next morning to see somebody in the *Jersey*, which lay near us, some of the sick calling to him for blisters, he told them to put tar on their backs, which would serve as well as anything, and so rowed away. However, after two or three days his wrath was appeased, and he deigned to come on board again. By this time, being about the 6th or 7th of July, in spite of all the remedies I had taken, I found my

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fever increasing ; however, it continued to be the remittent kind ; had it turned to putrid, as it did with numbers, in all probability I must have died as well as the rest. I had a large blister put on my back which helped me amazingly.

At length, on the 12th of July, the flag came alongside and cleared the hospital-ship. But the miseries we endured in getting to Elizabeth Town were many. Those that were very bad, of which the proportion was great, naturally took possession of the hold. No prisoner was allowed to go in the cabin, so that I with twenty or thirty others were obliged to sleep out all the night, which was uncommonly cold for the season. About ten next morning we arrived at Elizabeth Town Point, where we were kept in the burning sun several hours, till the Commissary came to discharge us.

I was afflicted with such pains in my joints, I could scarcely walk, and besides, was weakened with a raging fever ; nevertheless, I walked the two miles to Elizabeth Town ; here I got a passage in a wagon to within a mile of Crow's Ferry, which I walked ; got a passage over the ferry and walked on as far as

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Molly Budleigh's, where I stayed all night. Next morning, having breakfasted on some bread and milk, I set homeward; when I came to Obadiah Budleigh's corner I turned to the right and came home round about through the woods for fear of terrifying the neighbors with my ghastly looks had I gone thro Mount Pleasant.—July 14, 1780.

I forgot to mention that as soon as we came to New York and things were a little adjusted, Mr. Chatham, our first mate, went on board the *Aurora* and found his desk with mine and several other books open and everything taken out; so much for English honor and honesty.

N. B.—Wrote a letter by Hulings to Mr. G.—, but received no answer. Two days before I was exchanged got a letter from Mr. G.—, offering me anything I wanted, pretending he did not know what ship I was in. I returned him a letter of thanks, letting him know that if he could get me a parole, it would be the greatest favor he could do me. The same day Mr. Robins came alongside in a small boat with fish, offering me what money I wanted. I begged him to lay the money out in wine, oranges,

Philip Freneau
his Book of
Navigation

Fac-Simile Signature

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and lemons, and send them to me. He promised to be alongside in three hours but I never saw him afterward; in short, I met with nothing but disappointment among this people, and cannot sufficiently congratulate myself upon having got from among them.

Sir:—I take this opportunity to inform you that instead of arriving as I fondly promised myself at the fragrant groves and delectable Plains of Santa Cruz, to enjoy the fruits and flowers of that happy clime, I was unfortunately taken and confined on board a Prison Ship at New York, and afterwards in a Hospital ship where the damnable draughts of a German Doctor afforded far different feelings to my Stomach than the juice of the Orange or more nourishing milk of the cocoa.



E Freneau, Philip Morin
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F87 of the ship "Aurora"

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